

Facilitator's Introduction and Questions

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Compatibility: Facilitator's Introduction

We're all familiar with the word compatibility – it's a feeling human beings perceive when things fit together – people in their relationships, work environments, systems that fit together....when it works we say "it's good chemistry." We've all been in relationships that just work. And when you break it down, there are usually specific reasons that you enjoy some people more than others – humor, temperament, appearance, values, etc. This is described as compatibility. Sometimes it's completely predictable. Sometimes it's unexpected.

The built environment – in other words, the realm of buildings and their surroundings, as opposed to the natural environment – can also be an expression of compatibility. Or it can be an expression of incompatibility when things don't work well together.

For the most part, environmental compatibility is a series of deliberate choices to place buildings and their surroundings harmoniously. Built environments are made up of literally dozens of choices – built something this tall, this side, in this place, with these materials. But how do those choices relate to what's already there – also known as the context? Does the new building address the context or does it turn its back on the neighbors? Does a new building take design cues from buildings around it or does it go in a totally different direction? Sometimes the choice of strategic differences can create what we call texture – can make an environment visually rich and interesting.

Most of us here aren't trained as planners or architects, but human beings can be quite skilled at perceiving environmental compatibility. We know a good place when we see it and feel it. Good places make us want to linger. Think about how you feel in certain environments – what kind of place do you enjoy being? If you break it down, what do you like about being in that place? What are all the elements that must be considered to create compatibility in the built environment?

Compatibility Questions

Question 1

What are the elements of compatibility from your point of view? What needs to be considered?

Question 2

Prioritize the top 5 elements of compatibility that are most important to this table.

Location: Facilitator's Introduction

Our conversation tonight is being prompted by one of life's great inevitabilities – change. We all know that change often makes people anxious but we also know that forces which prompt change can also be regarded as opportunities. The opportunity before us now is a clearly demonstrated demand for more choices in Norman's housing market.

This demand for broader choices takes nothing away from the existing choices. For people who are happy living on 10-20 or 160 acres in east Norman or a large suburban parcel in west Norman, this is not an effort to change anything about the way you live. You have long-term investments there and this conversation is not about trying to alter your choices or change the way you live. The reality is that not everyone wants to live in those settings.

Community decisions we've made in the past in Norman allowed us to meet market demand as it existed then. But the demographics of Norman's housing market are changing and the market is responding to increased demand by requesting that we add land use choices which our comprehensive plan did not explicitly anticipate and our 1954 zoning ordinance could never have imagined.

Now a market demand for high density housing – particularly in and around the Campus Corner area – but other areas as well, gives us an opportunity to think about how we want the community to change and develop over the next 20 years. If we were to agree to higher density housing, where would that best fit? Where could higher density developments add value and improve quality of life for the existing neighborhood and add choices for Norman as a whole?

In the introduction, city staff described some conditions that, all our best evidence from around the country, shows us must be present in order for higher density housing to be successful: Arterial roads, Major activity centers and destination – i.e. critical mass, A sense of place.

Location Questions

Question 3

Given the prioritized list of compatible elements just discussed, and thinking about the assumptions presented for likely, logical locations for high density, what general areas in Norman do you think are appropriate for higher density development?